Human Rights and the Cosmopolitan Imagination: Questions of Human Dignity and Cultural Identity.

In our digital age very few of the globalized images seem to have much in the way of a presence. The age of information overload has delivered a mass culture where we scan our phones on the way to work or quickly look through newspapers on sites on line that are just as quickly passed over again. The development of media technology has done a great deal not only to insist on a global cosmopolitan culture of the present, but equally to reduce images, phrases and everyday media chatter to a fleeting presence. As Frederick Jameson (1998:111) so memorably argued 'social space is now completely saturated with the image'. If critical politics at the end of the nineteenth century could point to the aesthetic properties of art and nature as a means of resistance these features are no longer with us. What then in an age of globalisation, violence and commodification could stand as a critical politics? Our shared sense of global interconnectedness and mobility points towards a radical politics beyond the nation. What indeed does freedom and emancipatory politics now mean in an age of ever restless consumption and postmodern recycling of the past? Here we should stop to consider the deeply cynical horizons of the present where there is seemingly nothing beyond the market and its rationality. The 2008 financial crisis has been met less by a search for alternatives than it has by the attempt to resurrect the system as it currently stands. The financial crisis breaking across Europe and the United States has not led to the suspension of the dysfunctional neoliberal model that has brought war, banal consumerism, the withering of the social state and environmental degradation. Here I am concerned to ask what kind of politics might offer a principle of hope and imagination for our own time? Whereas postmodernism offered a politics of the image and deconstruction here I seek to investige whether more critical ideas could become associated with human rights and more cosmopolitan currents.

The radical historian E.P.Thompson (1956) returned to the work of English socialist William Morris to offer a sense of the radical imagination beyond a concern for a more pragmatic politics. The need to reimagine the world and offer people a

sense of hope as to what the world might become is political to the core. If all we have is a sense of freedom as the endless consumption of goods and upward mobility then critical politics is canceled. Could human rights then offer a more inspiring vision and more principled and hopeful vision in our increasingly anxious and consumer orientated society?

The tentative answer I offer to this question is a qualified yes. Here I shall argue that despite the problems and evasions of a politics of human rights (of which there are many) the idea of 'humane rights' acts as a modern utopia in a globally interconnected world in a way that is similar to that of Morris's concerns for craft, imagination and beauty. The global cosmopolitan task of our time is the cultural conversion of human rights into the rights of the citizen. As Ulrich Beck (2007) argues despite the problems of an emergent global culture of human rights and associated ideas of human compassion they provide a thin moral consensus within the world today. Such an argument has many detractors from conservatives who argue that the state should organically evolve over time to radicals who argue such rights are unlikely to foster the levels of resistance necessary to slow down the neoliberal project. Indeed many on the contemporary Left have given up on the idea of human right's given the role it currently plays in legitimising the dominance of the United States on the world stage. Others perhaps more cynically view human rights as a postmodern utopia where we cynically maintain a gap between the ideal of human rights and a more deformed present (Douzinas 2000). The work of the historian Samuel Moyn (2010) is significant here pointing to how human rights have only taken on a utopian significance after the failures of nationalist liberation movements. Human rights during the Enlightenment period meant not so much rights for all humans, but rather the realisation of citizenship rights in relation to the national state. It is only after the collapse of faith in socialism after the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and murder of Chilean leader Savador Allende in 1973 that the idea of human rights became a genuinely international movement. Human rights did not so much come of age after the holocaust, but after the defeat of socialism and national liberation movements. It is not that human rights do not have possibilities but they are perhaps relatively 'thin' when compared to more substantial forms of critique. Elsewhere human rights have been more pragmatically addressed as 'instruments for alleviating human misery' (Woodiwiss 2012:967). While these arguments have much to commend them from the point of view of cultural sociology they are either too

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dismissive or too pragmatic. Darren O'Byrne (2012) has argued that a sociological approach to the understanding of human rights needs to move beyond viewing them as the abstract commands of the legal system, and look at how they work both within institutional contexts as well as locations of meaning. Here we are caught less with the justification of human rights, but with a closer understanding of how claims to human rights become mobilised within specific contexts. The problem with this view is that it tends to leave questions of morality and humanity out of argument. Bryan S. Turner (2006), on the other hand, seeks to legitimate ideas of human rights through a discussion of vulnerability arguing that it is due to the precariousness of the body that we require the protection of rights. Turner then goes on that it is precisely because of our shared human condition that we require the virtues of human rights. This is indeed an interesting argument, however, by shifting the concern to the human body he then has little to say about how globally human rights have become associated with questions of freedom which inevitably points to a connection with philosophical liberalism. Instead my view is that human rights continues to require both philosophical justification and that the Kantian tradition remains central in this respect. Critical in this regard are associated ideas of human dignity which are central to understanding the widespread appeal of human rights as they are to their justification. Further that following Jeffrey Alexander (2010) we need to study how powerful moral ideas like human rights become imagined performed and represented in modern societies. In doing so we need to avoid more sociologically reductive arguments that fail to address some of the cultural complexity that surrounds an understanding of human rights in the modern context. Notable here is the recognition that while human rights are indeed parts of the dominant hegemonic language of the United States they can also offer radical possibilities. Following Susan Buck-Morss (2003) we need to maintain a 'double-vision' in respect of human rights in order to reconstruct the global public sphere. If the West likes to see itself as the global conscience of human rights then this also sets up standards and justifications through which it can be judged. In an increasingly complex global and information culture it is a myth to claim that the world's dominant superpower can easily control the flow of information and perception. This means that if human rights are at once part of the global hegemony of the dominant super power they also offer critical standards and judgments that may embarrass and question power.

Here I shall also argue that the utopian nature of human rights is at least suggestive of an alternative political project that has emerged in the context of relentlessly fast moving and increasingly global society. If the downside of a commodified and fragmented world is a fracturing of memory and a disappearing sense of history then perhaps more optimistically we can point to the popularity of new normative standards. The politics of human rights in this setting offers a critical culture of border crossing. That is human rights can call into question not only national borders, but can also problematise ideas of friends and enemies. The global culture of human rights will undoubtedly perform cultural mutations in different settings dependent upon how a shared language of norms becomes operationalised and performed. However to push my argument further I shall suggest that for human rights to be effective they need to be reimagined as the rights to a 'dignified' life. It is then in this context what we might describe as the 'humanity' of human rights that concerns me. How this becomes defined will clearly vary dependent upon the context but such a concern attempts to move the debate about human rights beyond some of its more recent formulations. The demand for human rights then can be connected to the needs for a humane and decent life rather than simply being about the setting of important limits to the polity.

The Cultural Politics of Human Rights

Discussions of human rights usually begin with a consideration of the European Enlightenment. The idea of universal human rights is often thought to have been constructed during this period although they have other sources as well. As Tzvetan Todorov (2006) argues ideas of universal rights spoke of the equal dignity of human-beings. This was secured through a politics that recognised both individual rights and human plurality. Of course many have justifiably pointed to the racist inheritance of the Enlightenment offering a sense of European superiority and justification for the dominance of white people globally (Kelley 1997). However a 'double-vision' is needed with human rights as the critical heritage of the Enlightenment can be associated with what might be described as the politics of liberal modernity. This is a critical constellation that aims to unsettle dogmatic forms of thinking in favour of ideas of rights, justice and democracy. Such a legacy is fundamentally incompatible with racist forms of thinking and better associated with the values of tolerance and the

critique of racial prejudice (Bronner 2004). While the Enlightenment had a racist heritage that sought to impress the cultural power of white Europeans over the Other it is also an overlapping tradition of thinking seeking to expand human possibilities and languages of freedom. As Stephen Bronner (2004) argues liberalism through its commitment to human rights, democracy and tolerance remains the main touchstone of Enlightenment thinking. Here Bronner argues that many critical social movements have sought to further the Enlightenment by bringing liberal principles into everyday life. Feminism, anti-racist politics and the working-class movement can be thought of as examples to expand the circle of freedom in this context. The languages of human rights, civil liberties and an inclusive social state have all sought to expand liberal understandings of freedom. In particular the Enlightenment stressed the value of the freedom to become a person of your own choosing. This was a politics of radical individualism that would eventually become transformed by black politics, feminist and labour movements (Berman 2003). This tradition stands opposed to the counter-Enlightenment of Leninism and National Socialism that pressed an illiberal culture of totalitarian dominance. Totalitarianism was based upon the idea that the 'I of the individual must be replaced by the we of the group' (Todorov 2003:14). The Other of totalitarian dominated societies being ideas of liberty and the autonomy of the individual. Missing here was any idea of compromise, tolerance or indeed independent critical thinking. Instead totalitarian societies required submission to the will of the group and a repression of dissenting voices. In particular totalitarian nations sought to use force to impose what they felt to be good. This was done by de-humanising those that stood in the way of the aims of the state and the development of a wider culture of fear and intimidation. We should then understand the development of the idea of human rights in this setting. Human rights remain significant the extent to which they make the case for human freedom without which human dignity is not possible.

The culture of human rights therefore is not as some of the Enlightenment philosophers have proposed built upon the intrinsic nature of 'man' as a rational being. Instead we are better to recognise the idea of human rights as a cultural invention of the Enlightenment which expanded on the idea of human freedom. Here my argument comes close (although with some reservations) to that of Richard Rorty (1998) who argues that human rights is built upon the distinction between the human and the less than human. Here the central question becomes the need to reject the

essentialist thinking of the Enlightenment and accept ourselves as a 'self-shaping animal' (Rorty 1998:170). This is different from a being that is either determined by history, the laws of biology or has a clearly definable essential nature. Human rights in this setting become less about who we 'really are' and more about the ability to be able to construct a shared human rights culture of becoming. The idea of human rights accepts that who we are is bound up in certain languages of self-description and asks whether we could become something different in the future. For Rorty this is dependent upon our capacity to engage in what he calls 'sentimental education' (Rorty 1998:176). Human rights is an ideal less dependent upon philosophical justification and more on the need to provide a thick descriptive language as to what counts as 'the human'. The difficultly becomes that notions of self-respect and understanding are often bound up with the way that we ('the civilised') are distinct from ('the barbarians') or the Other. Rorty argues that the reasons that human compassion in this regard is in such short supply is two-fold. Firstly often when people feel insecure they will experience the 'alien' as threatening and existentially troubling. Secondly that the promotion of human sympathy involves the attempt to promote different ways of seeing the Other. A sentimental education rests upon the need to understand the Other through different narratives produced through cultural frameworks. Human rights is more about the ability to engage the imagination through stories and narratives than it is the foundation of reason.

These features have a certain resonance with some of the recent Durkheimian writing on human rights. Jeffrey Alexander (2006) has made a powerful argument for the rethinking of questions of citizenship through notions of solidarity. As a leading thinker within cultural sociology, Alexander argues that the activation of citizenship as a concrete and meaningful term is centrally concerned with the promotion of feelings of solidarity within the civic realm. Calls for a more just or inclusive society inevitably depend upon our sense of being connected to others 'giving us the feeling we are all in the same boat' (Alexander 2006:13). Here citizenship is less a matter of the abstract norms of liberal philosophy and more about the ability to be able to connect to others through more everyday codes and discourses. The 'we' talk of human rights often works on a symbolic divide between the included and the excluded. Progressive citizenship in this view is where the damage done to the civic realm is repaired through the imagination of solidarity with the Other. This is a struggle that is never complete and always on going and critical. For Alexander

(2006:230) then 'to become a member of civil society is to participate in the broad and inclusive solidarity that declares men and women to be brothers and sisters'. This project Alexander argues has no central fault line like that between capital and labour, but is constituted through a multitude of political and cultural struggles that involves questions of cultural politics along a number of different axis including race, gender, sexuality, age etc. The most important point being that this is a postmodern struggle to disrupt ideas of pollution and Otherness and re-imagines civic solidarity through ideas of the sacred.

Elsewhere Alexander (1988) argues that it is through a re-reading of the late Durkheim that we can begin to piece together a cultural sociology that attends to the making and breaking of solidarities through the symbolic realm. Similarly Alexander argues that the sociological work of Robert Bellah et al (1996) has also been influenced by the extent to which civil domain can become the focus of a civic religion and the idea of the common good. If the late Durkheim (2001) insisted upon the value of a moral community beyond utilitarian calculation then he did so because he did not think that human flourishing was possible without a means of declaring that some values were sacred. Here Durkheim criticises a purely Kantian emphasis upon the universal rules of community to argue for the human need for meaning and purpose that goes beyond the limits of rationality. Similarly Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2010) argue if the foundations of sociology are wrapped up with the nation-state then it needs to become reinvented in the global era. In an age of increased awareness of global interconnection and dependency human rights have come of age. In Durkheimian terms human rights respects that the bonds of humanity go beyond the boundaries of nation-states. The idea of human rights provides an affective and emotional language poorly understood by utilitarian calculation. Here human rights are less about reasons and more about emotional and symbolic connections. In particular in our globally mediated times it is stories from the past and from across the world that provides us with a shared sense of interconnection. The paradox of human rights here is that they have emerged in an age dominated by a fragmented media culture that urges us to keep restlessly moving on to the next pleasurable horizon.

The problem with the Durkheimian view of human rights is that it has very little to say about human freedom or dignity. At issue here is the way that Durkheim's critique of Kantian ethics has been translated by more contemporary concerns. His view was not simply that Kantian ethics could be dispensed with altogether.

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Durkheim agreed with Kant that to think universally is to come up with laws that would be accepted by 'reasonable beings' and that this is 'a feature common to all superior forms of thought and action' (Durkeim 2001:341). However what this view fails to accept is the way that morality needs to be understood as being connected to particular social locations and contexts that make moral actions meanngful. In other words, missing from the Kantian paradigm is a deeper appreciation of a more affective, symbolic and emotional engagement with the wider world. However rather than viewing Durkheim and Kant as necessarily antagonistic to each other we should view them in a more complementary fashion. Similarly Rorty's arguments are persuasive the extent to which it understands that human rights are themselves a form of cultural politics however missing from his view is an appreciation of the continuing need to philosophically justify human rights.

For instance increasingly central to the appeal of human rights is the idea of human dignity. As Barbara Misztal (2012) argues the view of the dignity of all human-beings is presumed by many charters and declarations of rights all asserting the equal worth of all human-beings. Such notions as Misztal recognises are often traceable back to explicitly Kantian concerns with a shared capacity to use reason and live autonomously. Ronald Dworkin (2011) argues that in seeking to live good lives we are compelled to consider what we mean by the ethics of living well. Here he suggests that to do so we would need to accept the principles of both self-respect and authenticity. After the Enlightenment that we are dignified human-beings means that we treat others with respect (usually based on how we would wish to be treated) and that we take the attitude toward our own life so as to try and live as well as possible. Further that we can only do so by living in a way that is 'right for us' rather than living in ways that simply conform to the wishes and desires of us. If we are to live well then it matters whether our lives can be said to have been authentically chosen by ourselves. Without these features it would be both hard to claim we were living with dignity and that we had some obligations to try and ensure that others did the same. If dignity can be said to be central to ourselves living well then it should also demand that we extend these same principles to others. These principles then are clearly violated in matters of extreme prejudice, the denial of freedom of speech or indeed in the use of torture. Similarly Amartya Sen (2010) has argued that human rights are best understood as both a legal and sometimes cultural means of protecting the freedom of the self. These then are rights that are dependent upon shared notions of

dignity and humanity rather than the norms of citizenship. Indeed these human freedoms are suggestive as to how we should approach questions of cultural identity. In this regard, ideas of human dignity found within human rights documents actually depend upon a view of human-beings having complex rather than singular identities. Sen (2006) argues that if we wish citizens to live 'examined' lives of complexity and meaning in ways that might be assumed to be compatible with human rights and human dignity then we should seek to promote a critique of the idea of pure identities. The idea that human communities especially within the global age are made up of citizens of plural affinities and attachments means that some nationalist and religious accounts that seek to impose 'the' identity need to be carefully guarded against. The cosmopolitan view in this setting depends upon a defense of human rights in terms of the freedom and dignity of peoples and the need to explore the complexity of identity as opposed to those who would offer more reductive accounts.

However there are now a range of critics who with some justification point to the dependence of human rights on specifically Western or European traditions of thinking. Bhikhu Parekh (2000) has argued that while the United Nations declaration on human rights offers a minimal version of human rights that there is no cross-cultural understanding as to what we mean by cruelty, humiliation or indeed being allowed to live in dignity. That liberalism's defense of human rights is built upon Western individualism. This then is problematic in more collectivist cultural traditions that tend to be critical that the idea of rights does little to foster the spirit of community more generally. However missing from these reflections is an appreciation that liberalism and human rights can be stretched across cultural borders and this is especially the case in an increasingly interdependent world. Parekh is of course correct in his charge of enthnocentrism, but this does not mean that the concern for human rights and freedoms has not found expression across the world. Further as David Harvey (2012:3) argues there have been historical periods when human rights has taken a collective turn in that they seek to redefine the lives of subordinate peoples. Within our world human rights herald the possibility of building new forms of collective identity across national and other cultural boundaries.

More to the point then is Seyla Benhabib's (2004) view that the normative necessity of imposing upon citizens a unitary model of citizenship given the diversity of modern society is increasingly difficult to justify. This does not of course stop nation-states from imposing citizenship tests and other border controls but it does

mean that the recognition of human rights poses questions as to who is an Other and potentially opens up questions of a more universalistic nature. Arun Kundnani (2007) argues in this respect that the move away from multiculturalism and concerted attempts to move back to more overt politics of nationalism that seeks to demonise migrants and asylum seekers is contradicted by ideas of global citizenship and human rights.

If then for David Held (2010:xi) cosmopolitanism is the idea that 'universal principles must limit all human activity' then similarly Seyla Benhabib (2011) argues that the founding belief of cosmopolitanism is the recognition that we are all moral persons deserving of the protection of human rights. Jurgen Habermas (2012) similarly suggests that such is the respect for the dignity of the person within human rights documents this expressly forbids the idea of reducing persons to more instrumental criteria. The 'dignity' of the self is infringed by acts such as torture or overtly cruel treatment. Following Habermas (2012:95) then we might argue human rights are a 'realistic utopia' as once these norms have become embedded within the law then they can be appealed to by citizens of democratic states. However we also need to argue that human dignity with its roots in ideas of moral autonomy and the ability to decide what is the right way to live also depends upon certain cultural criteria. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2010) argues that such claims depend upon our ability to be able to see other people in terms other than the most instrumental. That we are able to 'see' others as complex people with their own ideas and feelings depends having access to critical public sphere and to our own imaginative capabilities. Human dignity it would seem is not only the matter of rights, but depends upon an appreciation of the complexity of others. In terms of human rights then the normative and the cultural remain strongly interconnected.

Challenges to Human Rights

There are however many in the world today who seek to challenge the idea of human rights. Some argue that they are simply impractical (not really relevant to 21st century realities) or that they are actually an expression of a form of Western cultural imperialism. These arguments are usually defeated by pointing to the genuinely global popularity of the ideas of human rights (if not always with agents of power and nation-states) and their ability to be able to defeat racist arguments connected with

ideas like the so called war between civilizations (Huntington 1997). As Bryan Turner (2006) argues human rights arguments are universal arguments that move the beyond questions of cultural relativism. The problem remains however as to how they articulated and whose interests they serve. Such a view is essential to the need to give human rights the kind of 'double' reading that I suggested earlier. The work of black American sociologist Du Bois is critical in this setting. Du Bois argued that the idea of 'double-consciousness' meant 'this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of world that looks on in amused contempt and pity' (Du Bois 2007:8). This complex form of political and cultural oppression suggests a double political struggle against racist practices and violence as well as poverty and inequality. Du Bois recognises the mutual interconnection of struggles for both cultural and economic justice. The desire for a more emancipated society could only be attained through an educated, participatory and above all democratic struggle for full citizenship. Du Bois was fiercely critical of others like Booker T. Washington who was willing to accept a more inferior civic position for the possibility of jobs and economic returns. Indeed Du Bois was concerned that the black movement for equal rights and civic status was being corrupted by the desire for money and wealth. The need for education, learning and meaningful forms of citizenship black people were being 'wooed…from a love of knowing, to regard dollars as the be-all and end-all of life' (Du Bois 2007:57). The struggle for human 'dignity' then connected both citizenship and human rights. Indeed throughout Du Bois (1985) career he sought to link ideas of human dignity to the need to both break with the global rule of white supremacy and affirm the citizenship of back people (Allen 2001,Leonardo 2002). Later Martin Luther King towards the end of his life progressively called for an end to global poverty and the need to downgrade the power of capitalism and militarism (Jackson 2007). The struggle for human rights was an extension of the struggle for civil rights on the part of black Americans whose ancestors had been so brutally transported across the world. This is the trans-national and intercultural context that seeks to explore the ways in which the struggle for racial justice questions nationalist assumptions and the borders of political community. Here the proposition is that rather than simply focusing upon the way human rights developed out of the European Enlightenment we look at the rich cosmopolitan resources offered to us by the black Atlantic to provide a counter-culture for Western modernity. Paul Gilroy (1993) argues that to

view the history of the West from the point of view of former slaves reminds us of the ways of histories of barbarity are written out of the European consciousness. These features would seemingly disrupt any simple idea of human progress, but instead return to Du Bois notion of double-consciousness that emphasise both the possibility of nightmare and liberation. For Gilroy (1993:127) the idea of 'double-consciousness' in Du Bois works through three different layers that co-exist, although not without tension. These features point to the cultural particularity of black Americans, the transition from slavery to citizenship (as of yet incomplete) and a kind of global consciousness that emerges through a diasporic African identity. The double-consciousness is the recognition that black Americans are at once national as well as global citizens. However it also demonstrates the complex relation that ideas of 'dignity' have to more cultural understandings.

What of the argument that human rights without the power to enact them are essentially empty? Hannah Arendt (2000) famously argued while the European Enlightenment's claim for the rights of man was a historical turning point that they were indeed dependent on the recognition by nation-states if they are to be effective. For Arendt to be worth having human rights need to become citizenship rights. This meant that the most important 'right' was the right to belong to a political community. However even here we need to remember that in Arendt's (1992) lectures on Kant she argued that 'when one judges and when one acts in political matters, one is supposed to take one's bearings from the idea, not the actuality, of being a world citizen'. For Arendt human rights could be linked to the need for human dignity that can also be found in global organisations like Amnesty International and the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly who give voice to the persecuted while seeking to alter the policies of states (Isaac 1996).The weakness of human rights doctrines however is most notable in the vulnerability of those who most needed their protection (namely stateless refugees) who were those least able to access them (Menke 2007). This argument tends to suggest that without the political support and processes of law making provided by nation-states that human rights documents quickly become relegated to meaningless pieces of paper. However as I have indicated this pessimistic view pushes Arendt's argument further than she intended. Further Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2010) argue within the context of global modernity such is the cultural power of human rights type arguments that many states seek to associate themselves with these doctrines. This of course does not prevent nation-states from being guilty of bad faith

in terms of the promotion of human rights, but it does move the argument beyond more pessimistic understandings. This argument can however become over-stated as we might claim along with Elliott (2007) that human rights are the embodiment of the law of the sacred (with as much connection to the world religions as the Enlightenment) but this does little to help those vulnerable peoples such as stateless refugees. For Zygmunt Bauman (2004) refugees and migrants are the Other of the new security state. As the state has become progressively stripped of its social and welfare function so it has increasingly become focused on the maintenance of borders, policing and security. The neoliberal state protects the rights of corporations while legimating itself to citizens by prioritising the security of nationals over the human rights of so called aliens. It is the rights of refugees that become increasingly precarious despite human rights declarations that become sacrificed or at least down-graded under neoliberalism.

We might recognise the role human rights could play in the struggle for a more democratic and humane culture, but equally we need to recognise what happens once citizens or denizens become stripped of their rights? If human rights requires the law of citizenship to become effective then what happens in a context where citizens are having their rights removed? This asks fundamental questions as to whether ideas of human rights are indeed dependent on shared notions of humanity. In other words, if ideas of human dignity have helped spread ideas of human rights across the world then what happens if humans are stripped of these rights?

Bare Life and the Life of the Citizen

Giorgio Agamben's (1995) concept of the'bare life' comes close to articulating some of these features. Agamben makes a basic distinction taken from Aristotle between a bare life (basically life reduced to biological functioning) and the political life that seeks to struggle for the good society. The key to the political life is membership of a recognisable political community and the ability to speak of questions of justice. Following Arendt, Agamben (2000) argues that the paradox of human rights is that the most vulnerable people are those without national citizenship who are also those who are least able to gain protection from so called universal rights. For Agamben rights are mostly citizenship rights. Here we should remember that the camps that were originally built to contain refugees ended up exterminating Jews and Gypsies.

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People could only be sent to their death once they had been stripped of any recognisable rights giving them a status beneath that of the of the second-class citizen. The camps themselves were born out of what Agamben (1995:167) calls the 'state of exception'. The camp is central to the history of European modernity the extent to which it signifies the suspension of the 'usual' rules of law and justice. The modern period however is marked by the emergence and normalisation of the state of exception. This can be seen in extraordinary rendition, Guantanamo Bay and the forcible removal of refuges and asylum seekers. We currently live in the age of the disposable human-being that is reduced to a bare life. Agamben (2000:180) goes further and suggests that we can see similar processes in attempts to 'eliminate the poor' ultimately by stripping them of their rights to welfare.

While Agamben's work deserves more detailed attention than can be gone into here his writing is suggestive of many of the difficulties with ideas of human rights (Norris 2000). The idea of bare life poses a number of problems for any notion of human rights as a global success story given the implication that the West has long operated with permanent zones of exception. This means that the holocaust is less of an exceptional event when it is linked to some of the prominent features of Western modernity. As William Connolly (2007) argues the idea of bare life emphasises the power of the state to draw basic distinctions between life and death. This suggests that ideas of bio-politics are central to our understandings of political modernity. It is the state that has the power literally to decide who has the right to life or citizenship. Here Agamben's work draws upon the insights of Foucault around bio-politics. Foucault's (1997) notion of biopolitics seeks to uncover the ways that despite talk of rights that state power has worked in the context of colonialism and totalitarianism through ideas of racial conflict. Key here as with Agamben is the right of the sovereign to preside over racialised questions of life and death as it seeks to eliminate those who are deemed to be inferior. Agamben however extends these arguments further to discuss the ways in which biopower may lead to the erosion of the 'humanity' of the human.

In Agamben's (2002) work on the holocaust he points to a kind of spiritual death that existed within the camps. These were literally the 'living dead' whose bodies were still alive, but had been reduced to a point where we can talk of civil death. Agamben (2002:58) describes these men as a 'vegetative machine' that existed in a zone between life and death. This was a kind of existence where all human dignity had been lost. The biopolitics of the camp succeeded in producing biological

creatures that had lost what we might call humanity. This is not to argue that there was no moral life in the camps, but that the stripping of human-beings of rights can be linked to an attempt to reduce human-beings to 'bare life'. For Agamben (2002:72) 'corpses without death' were like zombies who exhibited a form of living death. These completely degraded creatures had indeed not only lost the right to live but also the right to a dignified death. The removal of their rights had reduced many within the camps to a zone somewhere between life and death that Agamben describes as a 'bare life'.

Similarly Paul Gilroy (2010) notes the histories of racism, slavery and genocide are not usually allowed to disrupt the heroic narrative of the rise of human rights. The brutalities of colonialism and slavery are often understated in the rights narrative. Gilroy suggests that a different story would seek to recover the struggles of indigenous and colonised people for rights and justice as playing a leading role in the political imagination that surrounds questions of human rights. Here the desire for freedom was motivated by the desire to resist the reduction of human-beings to things (Gilroy 2010:72). As Gilroy (2010:72) argues:

'for descendants of slaves, they summon the history of being locked away from literacy on pain of death, confined to a place where cognition-thinking-was not a special door to doubt, method, and modern being rather a shortcut to the radical vulnerability of nonbeing and social death for people whose infra-human status meant they could be disposed of with impunity'.

These terms then speak in similar way to Agamben but this time the racialised context of bare life is made more explicit. Missing then from Arendt and Agamben is a more explicit consideration of the ways in which racialised discourses remain central to the idea of the development of human rights. Here Gilroy makes an intellectual challenge to the cosmopolitan imagination to reconsider human rights in the setting of what he calls the black Atlantic. However what is notable is the extent to which Gilroy's argument also makes an appeal to shared notions of human dignity and suffering. In the final section I want to argue along with others that questions of human rights and associated ideas of dignity and suffering poses certain problems in the context of globalised societies. Further, I shall also argue, while education is not the only context within which we might be said to learn about human rights it remains a central location where these and other moral concerns can be addressed in the modern context.

Human Rights and Education in the 21st Century

David Theo Goldberg (2009) has argued that globalisation phase one was concerned with the power of Europeans to brutally transform the world through relationships built through imperialism and colonialism in the search of new markets to exploit. This placed the politics of 'race' at the center of modernity. At the end of the Second World War and in the wake of the holocaust a new Europe was built on the idea of human rights and the progressive liberal critique of racism. If this did not end racism there was at least a growing awareness of the problems associated with questions of race in relation to Europe's own past. Indeed many critical black intellectuals like Du Bois, C.L.R. James and Franz Fanon pointed to the interconnections between the barbaric politics of fascism and colonialism (Kelley 2002:57). In the context of the second wave of globalisation dominated by the neoliberal project at this point the state returns to a regressive politics in respect of race, but this time in terms of 'contamination and threat' (Goldberg 2009:332). Neoliberalism is mainly driven by a concern for the freedom of capital and the desire to indulge in hyper-consumption. Neoliberalism in this respect attacks the social and inclusive part of the state as it seeks to replace it with border controls while sidelining the protection of rights. If the European state has been reconstructed through civil and human rights it can-not directly engage in discriminatory practices. In this context, the 'new racism' emerges through a cultural politics of belonging and an attack on the anti-racist programmes offered by the state. Not surprising in this setting there is an increasing questioning of the benefits of human rights, multiculturalism, positive discrimination and other educational programmes.

Neoliberalism cancels any understanding of cultural hierarchies and seeks to replace them with the 'free choosing' individual. Such an understanding has a certain need of human rights (largely political and civil) but seeks to down-grade human rights to asylum and welfare. This again returns us to the views of Agamben and Arendt that insist that human rights are in fact the rights of the citizen. Similarly neoliberalism contains within it its own versions of the 'bare life' with its insistence upon market rationality, down-sized welfare systems and the utopia of endless consumption. The 'bare life' of neoliberalism is not the life of the camps, but is one that rests uneasily with human solidarity beyond a concern for one's own family and

capacity to maximize earning potential. It is indeed hostile to the realisation of the creative imagination of the many as opposed to the few given the renewed emphasis that is placed upon vocationalism and more market friendly forms of education.

In the liberal tradition human rights are seen as a beacon of hope seeking to hold in check authoritarian regimes granting citizens the possibility of living their own lives. Perhaps for human rights to flourish we need a new narrative to explain what it means to be human at the beginning of the 21st century. If the Enlightenment traded on ideas of reason, autonomy and faith in progress these virtues have since been displaced by neoliberalism that more often than not seems to evoke culture of aspiration, upward mobility and market orientated success. We no longer live in an age however that can simply celebrate 'rational progress' given the violent excess and in-humanity of the camps and other forms of human rights abuse. Instead questions of human dignity and human rights require an additional narrative about our shared ability to be capable of being compassionate about the suffering of others. The possibility of cosmopolitan dialogue across a number of cultural and national borders holds out the view of ourselves as being able to respond creatively to new levels of global interconnection. If an idea of human dignity is central to ideas of human rights then so is a renewed emphasis upon the idea of ourselves as compassionate beings. Such a view has a variety of ethical sources including the Enlightenment as well as all of the world's major religious traditions. Returning to Rorty's (1998) idea of sentimental education what becomes important here is not simply different cultural narratives, but an understanding of the self with the capacity (not essential nature) to act compassionately for the benefit of others. Here there has been a considerable amount of sociological debate about compassion fatigue, or indeed the indifference of modern citizens to the plight of others (Mestrovic 1997, Tester 1999). Others like Ulrich Beck (2009) have argued that human rights are part of a European cosmopolitan vision. Here Beck (2009:604) argues that the 'foreign is not experienced and assessed as dangerous, disintegrating and fragmenting but as enriching'. This is different from multiculturalism as the Other may well emerge across the borders of nation-states. Further questions of difference have to be located within broader more universal criteria like human rights. More cosmopolitan understandings then seek to work against the anger and violence that is often directed against the Other through the promotion of universal standards and a sense of hospitality towards difference. Such views depend upon not only a break with methodological nationalism and the

acceptance of the stranger in more cognitive terms but on a more compassionate view of the self. Such views have quite significant implications for how we approach education and the politics of the self. If as Christopher Bollas (1992) argues the fascistic self is located in each of us then this should give us all cause for concern. The fascistic self (or state of mind) depends upon a closed mind and the forcible silencing of any inner doubts that we might have regarding the world. Here the mind has been 'purged' or purified of contradictory ideas and where others are denigrated. More cosmopolitan currents as we have seen are built upon shared ideas of human rights and dignity and receptivity towards human difference. Such features then need to become critical of both a globally commoditized culture that priorities homogeneity and fears cultural difference, and of the culture of nationalism that more recently has sought to expel more multicultural questions related to identity. A genuine culture of human dignity and human rights then continues to depend upon shared normative ideals and our ability to produce complex narratives about the lives of those with whom we remain profoundly interconnected in our shared global times. If global commodification and ideas of nationalist or indeed communalist 'we' are no guarantee of a shared culture of human dignity then we should think more carefully about how to promote a culture of human rights through more educated forms of dialogue and concern. Arguably these questions came to forefront in the development of the Occupy movement. The indignant global protests against the ways in which states have protected the rights of the rich while undermining the social citizenship of the poor and vulnerable connect these concerns to issues of human rights. Stephane Hessel (2013) whose pamphlet did so much to help inspire the Occupy movement argues that a society that seeks to demonise immigrants and cut welfare while accepting the rule of the rich is a society without dignity. As one of the citizens involved in the drafting of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights he argues that that the main impediment to universal dignity is not lack of money but the power of money. Human rights then offer the prospect for critique in the 21st century given the power of corporations to set economic agendas and nation-states who are currently prioritising both cultural cohesion the security of their borders. The cross border demand for human rights of the many as opposed to the few may yet become the central progressive cultural struggle of the twenty-first century.

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